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**Flu vaccine available at military treatment centers
in Europe for high risk patients**

Heidelberg, Germany – While most of us will be relying on preventive measures this year to ward off the influenza virus, high risk beneficiaries in Europe will get the added protection of the vaccine. Additional influenza vaccine has recently arrived in Europe and while it is still being prioritized for deployed and deploying Soldiers, officials expect some of the vaccine to be available for high risk patients at local medical treatment facilities in the next few days. The vaccine supply necessary to vaccinate the majority of deployed and deploying service members was distributed last month.

Vaccine supplies are expected to continue to arrive in Europe during the next few weeks and information on the availability of the vaccine for beneficiaries who are considered high risk will be available through local media outlets and from local military hospitals and clinics. Additionally, since vaccine availability is likely to vary at medical treatment facilities, patients should contact local clinics for vaccine availability information.

According to Col. Kent Bradley, Preventive Medicine Consultant, Europe Regional Medical Command, "we have already ensured that most of our Soldiers who are deployed have the vaccine. Now we are focusing on Soldiers who are slated for deployments and for our high risk beneficiaries. These are patients who are at greatest risk of developing serious medical complications from the disease."

"To ensure that this special population of beneficiaries is protected, the physicians and clinicians at our medical treatment facilities will be monitoring patients during routine appointments to determine if the vaccine is needed," Bradley said. "Additionally, patients who are unsure of their medical status and wonder if they may be a candidate for the vaccine this year should contact their local health care provider."

Bradley added that people who believe themselves to be in the categories listed below should contact their local military medical treatment facility as soon as possible for evaluation and to get the vaccine as appropriate.

High risk categories include the following:

- All children 6-23 months*
- Adults 65 years and older
- All women who are pregnant during the influenza season
- Persons 2-64 years old* with underlying chronic medical conditions. These include in part: pulmonary illnesses, such as emphysema, chronic bronchitis, or asthma; cardiovascular illnesses, such as congestive heart failure; chronic metabolic diseases, including diabetes mellitus; renal dysfunction; sickle cell disease; or immunosuppression (including immunosuppression caused by medications or by human immunodeficiency virus [HIV])

- Children 6 months-18 years* on chronic aspirin therapy, for rare conditions such as Juvenile Rheumatoid Arthritis or coronary artery abnormalities caused by Kawasaki's disease
- Health care workers involved in direct patient care
- Out-of-home caregivers and household contacts of children less than 6 months

* Note – children less than 9 years old require two doses of the vaccine if they have not been previously vaccinated.

People who have had serious allergic reaction to eggs or to a previous dose of influenza vaccine or people who have a history of Guillain-Barre Syndrome should not receive the vaccine and should consult with their local health care provider for other preventive measures if in a high risk category.

Bradley said that because of the vaccine supply situation, people not included in one of the priority groups should forego or defer vaccination and focus heavily on prevention.

"While getting vaccinated is the best prevention against influenza," he said, "there are several things people can do to make themselves less susceptible to influenza infection and to prevent spreading of the disease since most cold and flu viruses are spread by direct contact. These include the following:

- **Avoid close contact.**
Avoid close contact with people who are sick. When you are sick, keep your distance from others to protect them from getting sick too.
- **Stay home when you are sick.**
If possible, stay home from work, school, and errands when you are sick. You will help prevent others from catching your illness. Your employer may need a doctor's note for an excused absence. Remember: Keeping your distance from others may protect them from getting sick. **When you are sick or have flu symptoms, stay home, get plenty of rest, and check with a health care provider as needed.** Common symptoms of the flu include: fever (usually high), headache, extreme tiredness, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, muscle aches, and nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea, (much more common among children than adults).
- **Cover your mouth and nose.**
Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. It may prevent those around you from getting sick. Then, clean your hands, and do so every time you cough or sneeze.
- **Clean your hands.**
Washing your hands often will help protect you from germs. **When available, wash your hands -- with soap and warm water -- then rub your hands vigorously together and scrub all surfaces.** Wash for 15 to 20 seconds. It is the soap combined with the scrubbing action that helps dislodge and remove germs. **When soap and water are not available, alcohol-based disposable hand wipes or gel sanitizers may be used.** You can find them in most supermarkets and drugstores. If using a gel, rub the gel in your hands until they are dry. The gel doesn't need water to work; the alcohol in the gel kills germs that cause colds and the flu.
- **Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.**
Germs are often spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches his or her eyes, nose, or mouth.

- **At schools, educators, staff, and parents can help slow the spread of colds and flu. Always remind students to:**
 - cough or sneeze into a tissue and throw it away;
 - cover up with a sleeve if you don't have a tissue, and
 - clean hands often.
- **Get plenty of sleep.**
- **Engage in physical activity.**
- **Manage stress.**
- **Drink plenty of water, eat healthy foods, limit alcohol consumption and don't smoke.**